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The Beeps

Music for Awkward Situations

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Soundclip: "The Jesus Song"

It's hard to be nostalgic for the sixties, as they never really went away, but it's still makes for great escapist fun. Like cocktail revivalists Combustible Edison and Friends of Dean Martinez before them, multi-national Manhattan septet The Beeps remake yesterday's ultra-modern lounge pop for the harsh digital age. Their letter-perfect jetset sound and mod boutique image could be just a kitschy pose, but it's hard to pull off a modish vamp like Music for Awkward Situations without meaning it.

Scoring their own private Goldfinger, The Beeps punctuate their smoky spy flick vibe with layers of organ, flute, Tex-Mex guitar and hints of a deeper darkness. As a willing prisoner of her inner space-age bachelorette, singer/flautist Sue K. (Sue Krush out of classical-metal ensemble American Pistil) sets the tone as she icily coos, "I'm still here because I want to / I stay here because I have to" on opener "Wonderland". Slinky first single "Tell Me" curls out like smoke from an impossibly long French cigarette, and "Paterson" completes a murky triad, beginning with funereal organs and reticent Challengers-like chords as K. builds to a towering crescendo. It's perfect closing credits stuff for non-existent film noir.

It's not all moody frugging in dark suits, though; unlike some of their peers, The Beeps aren't limited to re-jigging Stereolab's Peng! until the grooves wear out. Predictably, "Surf's Up!" swaps detached uptown cool for a rollicking go-go guitar freakout peppered with trombonist Lane Moore's brassy blurts, while "Sunflower" is breezy finger-poppin' bliss, perfect for a day at the beach with your favorite tangerine-tuxedo-clad hipster. All of the group's disparate influences come to a head in "The Jesus Song", a chugging paeon to the cute boys of the Bible. Pablo Martin's fuzzed-out licks and Frank Campbell's frenetic keys battle to be heard over the roar of the wind as the song gleefully hurtles towards Dead Man's Curve at full-tilt.

All of the elements of the Groovy Decade's laid-back best -- reverb-soaked vocals, funky tablas, a touch of brass -- are present and expertly played, but mercifully without an ironic, self-satisfied smirk. They may be fashionably late for the cocktail revival party, but The Beeps come impeccably dressed just the same.

-- Steve English



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